

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CU-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 MCT-01 SY-05 AID-05 /081 W

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R 011400Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5912

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1393

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, TS

SUBJECT: UNIVERSITY TROUBLES

REF: TUNIS 1330

1. IN AFTERMATH OF FEBRUARY 24 DISORDERS IN CENTRAL TUNIS, STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS OBSERVING NEARLY TOTAL STRIKE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT APPROXIMATELY 100 DEMONSTRATORS WERE ARRESTED BY POLICE ON FEBRUARY 24. GOT IS LIKELY TO IDENTIFY RINGLEADERS AND TO TRY THEM SOON. DEPENDING ON HOW THEY ARE CONDUCTED BY GOT, TRIALS COULD PROVIDE RADICAL ELEMENTS AMONG STUDENTS WITH ISSUE THEY NEED TO GARNER WIDER SUPPORT AMONG STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITY TROUBLES COULD CONTINUE TO DISRUPT ACADEMIC YEAR.

2. INTERIOR MINISTER TAHAR BELKHODJA DISCUSSED UNIVERSITY TROUBLES DURING IMPORTANT SPEECH AT MUNICIPALITIES CONFERENCE ON FEBRUARY 25 IN SOUSSE. HE ATTRIBUTED DISORDERS TO SMALL MINORITY OF STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT INTERESTED IN UNIVERSITY ISSUES BUT RATHER IN POLITICAL AGITATION AGAINST GOVERNMENT. BELKHODJA ASSERTED THAT PARTY KEEPS DOOR OPEN TO WELL  
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INTENTIONED YOUTH, CITING RECENT PARTY DECISION TO HOLD FREE ELECTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP OF STUDENT UNION (UGET) AND DECLARED THAT THE UNIVERSITY SHOULD BE PROTECTED BY THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES, NOT BY THE POLICE OR SPECIAL GUARDS. THIS REMARK ALLUDED TO ONE OF FEW ISSUES OF DIRECT CONCERN TO MOST STUDENTS; I.E., USE OF SECURITY FORCES OR TOUGHS SUPPLIED BY PARTY TO MAINTAIN ORDER ON CAMPUS. IT ALSO

HIGHLIGHTED DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BELKHODJA AND PARTY CHIEF MOHAMED SAYAH WHO WAS IDENTIFIED LAST YEAR WITH POLICY OF ASSIGNING SPECIAL GUARDS TO CAMPUS. UGET LEADERSHIP, WHICH HAS BEEN CLOSE TO BELKHODJA, PASSED RESOLUTION, FEBRUARY 27 ATTACKING AUTHORS OF DISORDERS, DECLARING THAT IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN AGAINST USE OF SPECIAL GUARDS AND CONGRATULATING PARTY LEADERS WHO HAVE SHOWN "UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS."

3. BELKHODJA TOLD STUDENTS THAT THE DESTROURIANS ARE TUNISIA'S REAL "REVOLUTIONARIES," TUNISIA'S REAL "LEFT," AND THAT NO ONE COULD BE MORE COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THE MASSES THAN THE PSD. HE SAID THAT IF STUDENTS DID NOT WANT TO WORK WITHIN PARTY NO ONE WOULD FORCE THEM, BUT THEY SHOULD RECOGNIZE FROM WHERE THEIR BENEFITS HAVE COME. BELKHODJA WARNED STUDENTS THAT ANARCHY AND LAWLESSNESS WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. HE ALSO WARNED PUBLIC IN GENERAL THAT THE CHRONIC UNIVERSITY TROUBLES ARE NOT A POLICE PROBLEM BUT A PROBLEM FOR THE WHOLE NATION THAT MUST BE RESOLVED BY ALL ELEMENTS OF SOCIETY, INCLUDING THE PARTY CELLS.

4. TUNIS WAS ENGULFED BY ANOTHER PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION ON THE EVENING OF FEBRUARY 28 THAT MADE LAST THURSDAY'S DISORDERS LOOK INSIGNIFICANT. WITHIN TEN MINUTES AFTER TUNISIA'S FOOTBALL TEAM WRAPPED UP THE MAGHREB TITLE FOR WORLD CUP FOOTBALL PLAYOFF BY TYING ALGERIA IN ALGIERS, 20,000 TO 30,000 DELIRIOUS FANS FLOODED INTO CENTRAL TUNIS RUNNING DOWN AVENUE BOURGUIBA WITH TUNISIAN FLAGS AND  
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SHOUTING SLOGANS SUCH AS "LONG LIVE ATTOUGA" (TUNISIA'S VETERAN GOALIE), "LONG LIVE TUNISIA," AND "LONG LIVE BOURGUIBA." SECURITY FORCES AND PUBLIC SHARED THE JOY OF THIS OCCASION AND THERE WERE NO UNHAPPY INCIDENTS.

5. COMMENT: BELKHODJA'S SOUSSE SPEECH FOLLOWED THEMES HE HAS STRESSED OVER PAST YEAR; I.E., THAT THE POLITICAL SYSTEM SHOULD BE OPEN TO ALL AND THAT DISSIDENT VOICES SHOULD BE LISTENED TO WITHIN CONTEXT OF ONE PARTY SYSTEM. HIS STATEMENT THAT POLICE AND SPECIAL GUARDS SHOULD STAY OFF CAMPUS APPEARS SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED TO APPEAL TO STUDENT OPINION. MOST TUNISIANS, AND STUDENTS ESPECIALLY, ARE SKEPTICAL OF THIS BELKHODJA LINE BUT ALL ARE WAITING TO SEE WHAT CONTENT HE GIVES TO PROMISES TO MAKE UGET GENUINELY REPRESENTATIVE OF STUDENTS WHEN THAT ORGANIZATION HOLDS ITS SPECIAL CONGRESS LATER THIS MONTH. THE JOY OF FEBRUARY 28 DEMONSTRATION HAS, AT LEAST, CLEARED AWAY THE GLUM ATMOSPHERE AFTER STUDENTS AND POLICE CLASHED LAST WEEK.

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## Message Attributes

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